



Blessed Are *the* Difference Makers

by ROBERT FERRIER
photos by ROBERT TAYLOR

Archbishop Desmond Tutu's message of forgiveness and reconciliation challenges an OU academic convocation audience.

Intimidation, persecution and murder of innocent South Africans during apartheid were not the acts of “devils with pointy horns and tails. They were carried out by people you might see in church. All people and races are capable of great evil and great good.” With those words the eloquent Archbishop Desmond Tutu captivated the audience of 4,000 who came to honor him at a University of Oklahoma academic convocation on April 25.

OU President David Boren praised Tutu, saying the Anglican archbishop emeritus of Cape Town proved that “one person can make a difference. The example of your life challenges every person to act with moral courage. You have worked to establish racial equality, peace and freedom worldwide.” Tutu received the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his contributions to racial justice in South Africa.

“One of the incredible joys is to come here and say we asked for your help, and you gave the help and we won. You were part of that victory.”

Boren joined Governor Frank Keating, Oklahoma legislators and OU Regents in a regalia-drenched procession in Lloyd Noble Center, led by trumpeters, the Highlanders bagpipers and the Kiowa Black Leggings Society color guard. Keating introduced Tutu, now chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, lauding his “fundamental belief in the Judeo-Christian value of the worth of the individual and his courage to make that belief a part of South Africa’s legal system.”

OU Board of Regents Chairman C. S. Lewis III bestowed upon Tutu an honorary doctorate in humane letters.

In remarks titled “Moral Courage and Character: Important to the Course of History,” Tutu acknowledged Boren’s assistance in helping end white majority rule in South Africa nearly 20 years ago. Then-U.S. senators Boren and Sam Nunn of Georgia visited that country and were instrumental in drafting anti-apartheid legislation.

Tutu asked for a standing ovation to recognize Oklahomans for their prayers and support in the fight against apartheid. “One of the incredible joys is to come here and say we asked for your help, and you gave the help and we won. You were part of that victory.”

Courageous people make a difference in the world, Tutu insisted. As examples, he mentioned Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev and Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1995 Mandela, then president of South Africa, appointed Archbishop Tutu to head the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which allowed racist lawbreakers to admit all crimes, including murder, without fear of punishment. Tutu illustrated the capacity for forgiveness with a story of a woman who spoke to the commission about her father’s murder. The woman, when asked if she could forgive, answered, “We just want to know *who* to forgive.”

Tutu praised the woman’s response, terming it an affirmation of God’s dream for a world filled with forgiveness. He stated that there is enough goodness in human nature to see that dream through.

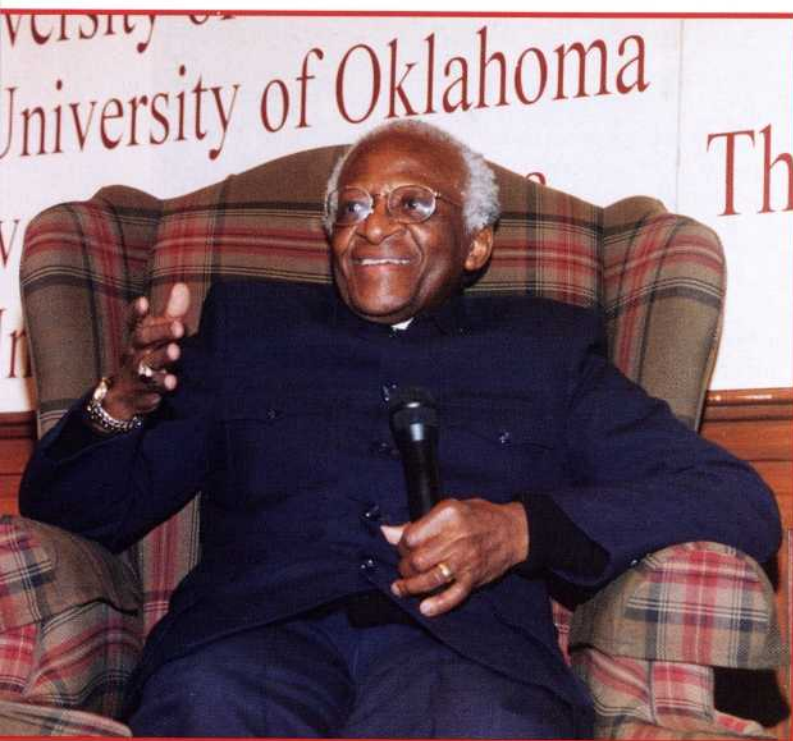
“Who is held in highest regard around the world?” Tutu asked. “Not someone who heads the most powerful military machine or leads the most prosperous country. It is Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison for opposing apartheid. When he emerged, the world expected him to be consumed with hate. Instead, he amazed

everyone by forgiving those who had imprisoned him and had done ghastly things to his people. We can learn a lesson from Mandela.”

Tutu lauded Gorbachev, the Russian leader who sacrificed personal power by reforming his communist government and reducing tensions with the



Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, left, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and OU President David Boren don their academic robes for the convocation to award Tutu an honorary doctorate in humane letters.



Members of the President's Associates, students and faculty were treated to a question-and-answer session with Archbishop Tutu at a dinner in the Union Ballroom following the academic convocation.

United States. That action cost him the presidency of the Soviet Union, Tutu said, but it ended the Cold War.

Referring to the tenets of Martin Luther King Jr., Tutu urged the audience—which included 1,200 high school students, as well as OU students, faculty and other visitors—to create a world where all sisters and brothers are one family regardless of race, color, religion or education. “Go on dreaming about a time when they will beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks,” he said.

The archbishop said the examples set by these leaders show that “there is no way oppression, lies and injustice can have the last word.”

Tutu looks forward to a world without defense spending, where everyone will have equal education. “I have no one except you to help me realize my dream,” he said in a rousing conclusion.

Later, at a President's Associates dinner in the Oklahoma Memorial Union, Tutu responded to questions from Moderator Boren and the audience. He noted with some amazement that the second round of free elections in South Africa went unnoticed by the world press, in contrast to the media frenzy accompanying the first elections. He suggested that the United States use some of its budget surplus to help South Africans as they struggle with newfound freedoms.

While waiting for the academic convocation processional, Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited with James Kopelman, student chair of the OU Speakers Bureau, which sponsored the event.

“If you lived in a shack before democracy—and you still live in a shack—what have you gained?” he asked. He likened the suggested U.S. aid to the Marshall Plan, which helped Europe recover following World War II.

Referring to the work of Tutu's post-apartheid commission, Boren observed that “many people would say, ‘Why dredge up the past?’”

Tutu's response: “If you open the wound and cleanse it, you can have healing.”

Tutu surfaced as an international figure in 1978, in the wake of the Soweto uprising, when he was named general secretary of the South African Council of Churches. As Tutu led SACC's emergence in South African spiritual and political life, he found himself embroiled in the anti-apartheid movement.

For five years Tutu worked to bridge the chasm between black and white Anglicans in South Africa as bishop of Johannesburg and later as archbishop of Cape Town.

The author of four collections of sermons and addresses, he is now writing two books—one chronicling the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the other dealing with transfiguration.

Tutu holds honorary degrees from Harvard, Oxford, Columbia, the Ruhr, Kent and Aberdeen universities—and the University of Oklahoma. He received the Order for Meritorious Service Award (Gold), the Archbishop of Canterbury's Award for outstanding service to the Anglican Communion, the Prix d'Athene (Onassis Foundation), the Family of Man Gold Medal Award and the Martin Luther King Jr. Non-Violent Peace Prize.

Tutu retired as archbishop of Cape Town in June 1996, and was named archbishop emeritus in July of that year.

The convocation, originally planned for January but rescheduled because of a heavy snowstorm, was the second in two years at OU. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was awarded an honorary degree at a Lloyd Noble Center convocation in February 1999.

